

she's complicating the process
I have 15 minutes
to get her there
gas up
& return the cab for the night man
the meter's on
I try to get a coherent answer
she doesn't like my tone I guess
out she goes with her clanking bags
the end of another perfect day

45

at that age
Hemingway was liberating France
Céline had 2 major novels out
Bukowski was consolidating
Sinatra was forming his own record company
Bogart was making To Have & Have Not
my father lost everything he had
my mother sat in divorce court
I just can't stop
pounding on these keys
turning out words
for a few crumbs of encouragement

I DIDN'T KNOW

it was all new to me
there was the ad
12 famous writers all grouped together
they had made it
I hadn't read any of them
but that didn't matter
all I had to do
was send them a sample of my writing
they'd let me know
if I had potential
I filled out the application
& sent one of my poems
a couple of weeks later
I heard from them
they could see my potential
once I had completed the correspondence
course
there'd be nothing
standing in my way
the course was only \$600
I didn't send them any money

in fact
I was no longer interested
a couple of weeks later
the bell rang
I wasn't expecting anyone
a gray haired guy came up the stairs
full of false cheeriness
I didn't like him
he asked if he could sit down
I listened to his pitch
he asked me for some water
a little annoyed that he had to ask for it
he referred to writers as "scribblers"
that was another turnoff
I was only 22 at the time
he probably thought
that he could overwhelm me
with his seniority
but it was evident
that he was no writer
just a rather cranky salesman
my decided lack of interest
only made him press even harder
he must've really needed a sale
the contract was turned in my direction
he had taken a pen with black ink
& made a star
over & over on the same spot
it looked ugly & desperate
I was supposed to sign on the line
where he had inked in that star
both his hands were across the table
clenched in fists
I didn't sign
& he wasn't any happier
the school later received
some bad publicity
& quietly disappeared
that salesman probably
scarred every member of his family
for life

"FAMILY VALUES"

leave it to a politician
to corrupt the language
with a built-in abstraction
what does it really mean?
mom n pop n the kids
sitting in front of the set
watching 101 Dalmations?